

STATE THEATRE COMPANY SOUTH AUSTRALIA AND
AUSTRALIAN GAS NETWORKS PRESENT

A View from the Bridge

BY ARTHUR MILLER



Study with State



**STATE
THEATRE
COMPANY**
SOUTH AUSTRALIA

SYNOPSIS

A View from the Bridge is a two-act play set in Red Hook, a working class shipping port in Brooklyn, New York. Narrated by a lawyer, Alfieri, the story centres on the Carbone family – dock worker Eddie, his wife Beatrice and their niece Catherine.

The arrival of Beatrice's cousins, Rodolpho and Marco, propels the action of the play. As the cousins illegally seek work and a better life in the United States, their presence brings to light the hidden desires of each member of the Carbone family.

For more, watch the trailer for the show online:
statetheatrecompany.com.au/shows/a-view-from-the-bridge

RUNNING TIME

Approximately 140 minutes (including 20 minute interval).

SHOW WARNINGS

Contains adult themes, sexual references, mild coarse language, strong violence and the use of herbal cigarettes.

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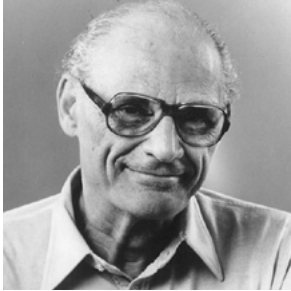
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Creative team



Arthur Miller

WRITER



Kate Champion

DIRECTOR



Victoria Lamb

SET DESIGNER



Enken Hagge

COSTUME DESIGNER



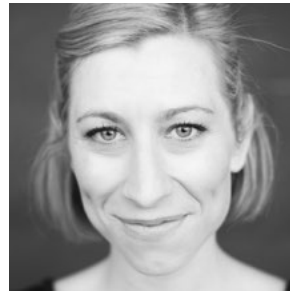
Chris Petridis

LIGHTING DESIGNER



Jason Sweeney

COMPOSER &
SOUND DESIGNER



Jennifer Innes

ACCENT COACH



Martin Hughes

CONTACT IMPROVISATION



Clara Solly-Slade

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR



Meg Wilson

LIGHTING SECONDMENT

Costumes made by State Theatre Company Wardrobe. Set made by State Theatre Company Workshop.



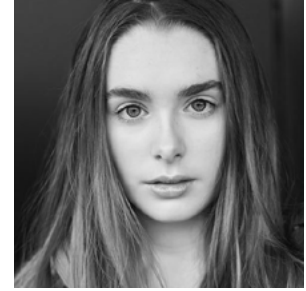
Mark Saturno
EDDIE CARBONE



Bill Allert
ALFIERI



Elena Carapetis
BEATRICE



Maiah Stewardson
CATHERINE



Antoine Jelk
RODOLPHO



Dale March
MARCO



Brett Archer
MIKE / 1ST OFFICER



Chris Asimos
LOUIS / 2ND OFFICER



Alex Hayley
STAGE MANAGER



Clare Miyuki Guerin
ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGER



An interview with Kate Champion

What is *A View from the Bridge*? What are its key themes?

A View from the Bridge is essentially about a man who lacks a self-awareness, a fatal flaw that propels the story. It's an incredibly timeless story that examines how a lack of self-analysis can be fatal.

I think it also explores immigration, particularly illegal immigration, and the threat of the 'other'. It looks at the immigration story and how it effects small, tightknit communities that resist change.

I think a really major theme – and it pertains to Eddie again – is his inability to change. Humanity will always evolve and change, that is something that will never change, and he seems to want to freeze his life and not move forward. I think that this play teaches us that this mentality is not healthy.

It also, I think, portrays abusive patriarchal power. The way women are treated in this play is old-fashioned, but still relevant... Not sexual abuse, but psychological abuse and restricting younger people. Even though we've come a long way today, I think this is still incredibly relevant and prevalent.

Ultimately, I think the play is about a younger generation seeking a brighter future.

KATE CHAMPION IN THE REHEARSAL ROOM FOR A VIEW FROM THE BRIDGE.
PHOTOS: MIKE SMITH



What will your version of *A View from the Bridge* look like?

I hope my version of *A View from the Bridge* is a suspended, floating time capsule. Even though it is set in the 1950s, by decluttering it, by taking it away from its specificity, I want the audience to be able to identify with it more. I think if you declutter it you allow the audience to see themselves or see stories that they relate to more easily. So many of the themes are relevant to us.

What is tragedy? How are you interacting with classical ideas of tragedy in this production?

A View from the Bridge has two main connections to formal or traditional Greek tragedy. The first is that the protagonist, the tragic hero, Eddie, has a fatal flaw. That fatal flaw is his lack of self-awareness. I think that connects to Greek tragedy.

Secondly, there's the use of Alfieri as the narrator, representing the Greek chorus. He's telling the story retrospectively, which is a very common trait within Greek tragedies. Often, the events of a Greek tragedy happen in one day, in 24 hours, so the audience always needed to be told what led up to the events. Miller has used that device quite effectively.

Overall, it's the feeling that it's fateful, that this outcome is inevitable, and this teaches the audience a moral tale.

An introduction to the life of Arthur Miller

Arthur Asher Miller was born in 1915 in Harlem, New York City. He was of Polish Jewish descent with both of his parents tracing their roots to the town of Radomyśl Wielki in Galicia, which was then a part of Austria-Hungary (now Poland). His father, Isidore Miller, was born in the town, while his mother, Augusta Miller (nee Barnett), was a first generation American whose parents came from the same place.

Isidore owned a successful women's clothing manufacturing business, which allowed the family to live very comfortably when Miller was younger. But after the 1929 Wall Street Crash, they struggled to make ends meet. They lost their home in Harlem and moved to a lower income neighbourhood Brooklyn, a location that would inspire much of Miller's work later in life. Miller worked several menial jobs during and after high school, helping to support his family and pay his tuition.

In 1934, Miller started studying at the University of Michigan where he majored in journalism and worked on the student newspaper. He wrote his first play, *No Villain*, over six days in 1936 and subsequently changed his major to English. He took a playwriting seminar with the influential Professor Kenneth T Rowe, who would become a lifelong mentor. Under his guidance, Miller started writing more plays. During his time at university, two of Miller's plays won the Avery Hopgood Award – *No Villain* and *Honors at Dawn*.

After graduating in 1938, Miller began writing radio plays and scripts with the Federal Theater Project in New York before it was shut down in 1939. He then began working in the Brooklyn Navy Yard while continuing to write.

Miller married Mary Grace Slattery in 1940 and they later had two children, Jane and Robert. He had his first play, *The Man Who Had All The Luck*, produced that same year.

In 1941, he began writing *All My Sons* and the play was produced for Broadway in 1947, directed by Elia Kazan. It was a huge success, earning him a Tony Award for Best Author.

In 1948, Miller wrote the first act of *Death of a Salesman* in just one day. Within six weeks, he had completed the play. It was first performed on Broadway in 1949 to critical and public acclaim. Miller received his second Tony Award for Best Author, while the play received the New York Drama Circle Critics Award, the Pulitzer Prize for Drama and numerous other theatre awards.

In *Death of a Salesman*, Miller had deliberately centred a 'common man', Willy Loman, at the centre of the tragedy. This theme was expounded upon in his 1949 essay "Tragedy and the Common Man", which was published in the *New York Times*, and in his later play, *A View from the Bridge*.

The Crucible, another of Miller's best known works, was written in 1952 and produced on Broadway in 1953. Ostensibly about the Salem witch trials of 1692, the play was a commentary on the actions of the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC). The HUAC had questioned and blacklisted a number of Miller's peers, including director Elia Kazan, for their alleged communism.

A View from the Bridge was first performed as a one-act drama on Broadway in 1955, before being revised to the current two-act version for its West End premiere in 1956. Also in 1956, Miller divorced Mary Grace Slattery and married actress Marilyn Monroe. The couple were the subject of intense public interest and scrutiny.

Miller became a target of the HUAC in 1957. He was found in contempt of Congress for refusing to name others sympathetic to the communist cause and was subsequently blacklisted, fined and given a prison sentence. His conviction was overturned by the court of appeals in 1958.

In 1960, Miller began work on his screenplay for *The Misfits*, starring Marilyn Monroe. Miller and Monroe divorced in 1961, shortly before the film's premiere.

Miller married Inge Morath, a photographer who had worked on *The Misfits*, in February 1962. That same year, Monroe died. Miller and Morath later had two children, Rebecca and Daniel.

Miller's *After the Fall* was produced in 1964. The play is said to be a reflection on Miller and Monroe's marriage.

Throughout the 1970s, Miller experimented with different forms of theatre with little commercial or critical success. He also wrote a number of essays on theatre and his own work during this time, which were much better received.

Miller continued to write in the 1980s and 90s, and a number of his plays were produced and made into films. Notably, his autobiography, *Timebends*, was published in 1987.

In 1999, Miller was awarded the Dorothy and Lillian Gish Prize; in 2001, he received the National Book Foundation's Medal for Distinguished Contribution to American Letters; he was awarded Spain's Principe de Asturias Prize for Literature in 2002, and the Jerusalem Prize in 2003.

Morath died in 2002. In 2004, Miller announced his relationship with Agnes Barley, a minimalist painter more than 50 years his junior. Miller's final play, *Finishing the Picture*, opened in Chicago in 2004, and included a character said to be based on Barley.

Miller and Barley had intended to marry, but he passed away before the marriage could take place. Miller died of bladder cancer and heart failure on 10 February, 2005, at age 89.



Director's note from Kate Champion

As much as *A View from the Bridge* draws inspiration from the era in which it was written, it equally stands as a modern classic tackling universal themes that remain achingly relevant to our times.

From the plight of illegal immigrants and issues around domestic patriarchal abuse to the innate survival instincts of its female characters, the play's effect is, to this day, still alarmingly human.

Through its embrace of both classical and modern form, Miller's writing has invited us as creators to engage with the expansion of our audience's imagination - he did not demand conventionalism.

And despite the play's propulsion towards tragedy, Miller wanted us to see more than the apparent hopelessness of the situation.

As he wrote: "It is curious, although edifying, that the plays we revere, century after century, are the tragedies. In them, and in them alone, lies the belief - optimistic, if you will, in the perfectibility of man."



CAST AND CREATIVES FROM A VIEW FROM THE BRIDGE IN THE STATE THEATRE COMPANY REHEARSAL ROOM. PHOTO: MIKE SMITH.

What next?

Our “What next?” sections include questions and activities based on previous pages. These can be used for individual reflection or as class exercises.

On page 8, Director Kate Champion mentions four central issues or ideas in *A View from the Bridge* - immigration, fear of change, patriarchal power and a younger generation seeking a brighter future.

Which of these concepts do you think the play speaks to most? What is the play trying to say about this issue or idea? Use specific examples and quotes to support your argument.

Supporting materials

Video interviews with Kate Champion

Links to these resources are under the *A View from the Bridge* drop-down menu at: statetheatrecompany.com.au/education-program



Who is Eddie Carbone?

AN INTERVIEW WITH MARK SATURNO
ON EMBODYING MILLER'S PROTAGONIST

How would you describe *A View from the Bridge*?

A View from the Bridge is a modern tragedy. It's a tragedy in the true, Greek sense of that word, revolving around a central character and that character's downfall. In *A View from the Bridge*, this central character is ostensibly good. His downfall doesn't really come from any horrible, evil thing that he does – it's a confluence of events that happen, despite the best intentions. The difference, I think, is that Greek tragedy centres on a hero, and the man who this play centres on is not a hero – he's an everyday guy.

How would you describe Eddie Carbone?

It's a funny thing, *carbone* is the Italian word for coal or charcoal, which I find so elemental. Eddie Carbone is an element.

But who is Eddie Carbone, the man? I think if you asked Eddie that question, he would say that he is a simple man working hard to support his family. I would say that's only on the surface level; there is so much more complexity to him. No one is, of course, just a simple person. But Eddie can't come to grips with those complexities.

If Eddie had his way, the world would continue on the path that he has constructed for himself, which is, in his mind, a very honest, honourable path. But change is inevitable, and he can't handle that change. He can't handle the change of the world around him, and he can't handle the change within himself. That is what essentially drives the play. It's his incapability to be introspective. He's not an inward thinker, he's got his blinkers on, and that is his tragic flaw. It is because of this that the world falls apart around him, and it effects everyone. They fall like dominos – not necessarily physically, but emotionally, psychologically. It effects everyone in his path.

How do you bring a character to life?

I try not to impose too much to start with. I really like to find things organically – little things, like a little gesture or tic, need to have a story and some kind of history behind them. These quirks can't just be for character's sake – that's empty and doesn't ring true. I think that the audience can smell that lack of authenticity a mile off.

I'm very vocally driven. I'm a bit obsessed with listening to people's voices, accents and vocal tics. If I start anywhere, it's with voice - how the character breathes and where that voice lives. From there, it's working it out with the people around you and being malleable as you work with the director.

Why do you think Miller's work is so powerful?

There's a lot in the silences; there's a lot left unsaid. How do you communicate that subtext to an audience? It's really tough. But the answer to that lies in how you attack the language and how you leave that hanging. Miller's language is not sparse, but economical. It's contemplative. Miller allows that silence, that moment and the things left unsaid, to just kind of drop. In doing so, he lets people process before moving into the next beautiful, simplistic piece of poetry.

The time Miller was writing was one of great prosperity for the middle class in America. These were the people he was surrounded by and they were the people he wrote for. Even with that audience in mind, he was able to make poetry of the most pedestrian stories and the most pedestrian language. That's his genius.

What do you want the experience of *A View from the Bridge* to be for the audience?

I hope the experience the audience has is not one of epiphany, but a bit of an enlightenment – an opportunity to dig a little deeper and think about how to avoid these kinds of events happening in their own lives. These characters are ordinary people, there's nothing grand about their lives. Yet, the tale is epic. The feeling is epic.

The audience are almost guided through what's going to happen, so there's no rug getting pulled or anything like that. It's not the element of surprise that takes their breath away, it's this slow burn, which hopefully makes the audience go away and say 'let's not be that way to each other or to ourselves'.



Speaking up

AN INTERVIEW WITH MAIAH STEWARDSON
ON FINDING CATHERINE'S VOICE IN MILLER'S CLASSIC

Who is Catherine?

Catherine is the niece of Eddie and Beatrice, but practically lives as their daughter. They've brought her up her whole life.

I think Catherine is a wonderful character. I think it's very easy to misread her and misinterpret all her nuances, but she's endearingly curious and insightful. She's very in touch with her sense of self, which we get to see progress through the play. Catherine knows that things are changing, and she's starting to learn that she has power within her. She knows she needs to tap into that and find her strength within herself.

How does Catherine negotiate desire within the play? How does she express her own desires and deal with those of the people around her?

Catherine has this really beautiful journey, which I'm so excited to explore – it's her finding her sense of self, finding her voice, and actively questioning events and the people around her.

Catherine has been almost trained and taught to be silent and to be small. She sees that through the way Eddie interacts with and silences Beatrice, as well as in the way both of them treat her at different times. She's often suppressed and shut down when she's got questions about the ways things are functioning in her society.

At first, Catherine tolerates the pressure to be quiet. But then Rodolpho enters her life and he sees the world in this new, magical sort of way. Catherine realises maybe there's a different way to interact with people when things are not going in a way that's comfortable for you. She realises that she has power within herself to express the way she's feeling. It takes her a bit of time to find her voice but when she does, she yells it from the top of the roof! She really makes herself heard.



How do you approach analysing and understanding a piece of theatre as a performer?

The script is often the first impression you have of a play, and it's really easy to get caught up in the words and action on the printed page. Those things are important, but so are all of the 'in-between' bits. It's really easy to forget that a play is just moment to moment, humans learning how to interact with each other. It's about how people problem solve, essentially. I like to think about what problem my character is trying to solve in a particular moment, and once that one has been dealt with, what's the next problem and how do they solve it? The text and structure of the play is so important, especially in getting your head around the journey and the narrative of the character. But I think in terms of analysing the play, it's about all the moments when you check in with your character, see what they're trying to solve and how they're going to get from A to B.

What do you think *A View from the Bridge* is trying to say? Why is its message still relevant?

I think *A View from the Bridge* is important to audiences today because, at the core, it's about patriarchal systems – how they're incredibly flawed and they're not healthy for anybody. This is an issue we see that echoed and mirrored in society today.

The play is about listening to the voices that are really easy to ignore. In contemporary Australian society, there are so many minority groups, people who come from so many walks of life, who are taught to be quiet and small because it makes everybody else feel comfortable. I think what *A View from the Bridge* teaches us is that there is real power in listening to the people you've been told not to listen to; there's an incredible power in standing up and using your voice.

I also think that this play speaks strongly to young people. I feel that young people today are often trained to be small and quiet because we don't have the experience and knowledge of older generations. But the reality is that things are changing and we can contribute. We've got a voice and we should use it.



Cast Q&A

WITH ANTOINE JELK (RODOLPHO)

Who is Rodolpho?

Rodolpho is the youngest of the two immigrant brothers, Beatrice's cousins, who come over from Sicily in Southern Italy to New York to live with Beatrice and Eddie. He doesn't have nearly as much responsibility as his older brother Marco, who is there very clearly to make money to send back to his family. Rodolpho has a bit more freedom – he has his eyes set on the lights of Broadway and adventure. This is a luxury that Marco can't afford. Rodolpho is quite a modern young man – he sings, he cooks, he likes making dresses, he's done a bunch of that kind of stuff.

In New York, Rodolpho gets involved with Catherine, Eddie and Beatrice's niece, and they fall in love. This would be fine if it were not for the fact that Rodolpho really gets under Eddie's skin.

How do you go about building a character?

Start with research and build with imagination. But most important are the relationships you develop with the other actors in character throughout the rehearsal process.

What does *A View from the Bridge* say in 2019? Why do we need to hear it?

Immigration is an issue that is still relevant today. There's also relevance in the way the play deals with masculinity and I think there's a lot that men can take away from it. Eddie Carbone sort of exemplifies the idea of a manly man – he works hard, support his family, but has no emotional vocabulary. He is not able to self-reflect in the way that I think all men, all people, need to do.

LEFT TO RIGHT: DALE MARCH AS MARCO AND ANTOINE JELK AS RODOLPHO. PHOTO: MIKE SMITH.



Cast Q&A

WITH BILL ALLERT (ALFIERI)

Who is Alfieri?

Alfieri is Eddie Carbone's lawyer. He's the person Eddie goes to for advice and help on how to get out of the position he finds himself in. In a way, Alfieri is also Eddie's confessor. Arthur Miller wrote the role to be like a Greek chorus in his modern tragedy. Alfieri is the 'view from the bridge' on many levels; he acts as a go-between for the audience and the action on the stage, he understands the traditional Italian culture and the contemporary American culture, and he is the link between the law of the courts and the law of the streets.

How do you bring a character to life?

It begins with understanding the character's journey in the story, and, most importantly, what they want and why they want it. Once you begin to understand their emotional and psychological reality you can start to make vocal and physical choices. How do they speak? How do they carry their body? How do they walk?

For me personally, it's really important to love my character. I need to be proud to play them. Sometimes that can be difficult if their intentions or actions aren't the best but that's also one of the enjoyable challenges of being an actor. You need to find a way in.

What are the main themes in *A View from the Bridge*?

There are some big themes in this play. What is the meaning of true justice? When does love become so strong that it destroys someone? Is it worth fighting for honour? Is it better to reveal who you truly are or keep it buried?

Alfieri wrestles with these themes constantly because he knows how the story ends. And again, his 'view from the bridge' tells him that none of the play's questions have black or white answers.



Exploring the characters

EDDIE CARBONE

The tragic protagonist of *A View from the Bridge*, Eddie Carbone is a working class man - a longshoreman living in Red Hook, Brooklyn, with his wife Beatrice and niece Catherine. He's a hard-working man who cares a great deal about protecting his family and his own reputation.

Eddie's protectiveness over his niece Catherine is witnessed early on when he expresses concern over her leaving school to obtain a job. However, the audience is quickly led to understand that his protectiveness over Catherine is unhealthy – not only can it be seen as an attempt to stop her from growing up, but it seems to arise from a possessiveness that indicates a possible sexual desire for her. His wish to keep Catherine a child might be seen as an attempt by Eddie to repress his feelings for her. Other characters, such as Alfieri and Beatrice, try to draw Eddie's attention to this unnatural desire, but Eddie is not able to understand them.

Eddie struggles with self-expression and self-analysis. While he is able to express ideas about what he thinks is right, he is not able to express his own feelings or to reflect upon them. The audience seems to understand Eddie's feelings better than he does himself. Eddie's inability to recognise his desire for Catherine and his obsession over Rodolpho (which may also be sexual in nature) are a huge factor in his downfall.

Eddie's desire to protect his name, his reputation and sense of honour, is also something that becomes unhealthy. When Eddie loses the respect of his peers, his obsession with getting Marco to 'give him back his name' becomes a barrier to repairing his relationship with his family.



LEFT TO RIGHT: EDDIE CARBONE, BEATRICE & CATHERINE.
DRAWINGS BY ANTHONY NOCERA FOR STATE THEATRE COMPANY.

BEATRICE

Beatrice, or 'B', is the character who brings the main actors in the play together – she is the wife of Eddie, the aunt of Catherine, and the cousin of Rodolpho and Marco.

Beatrice is a devoted wife to Eddie. Although she is critical of him over his actions towards Catherine and Rodolpho, she will also defend him to others. She desires Eddie, as evidenced when she questions him about their (lack of) sexual relationship. She has an ability to clearly see other people's desires, particularly Eddie's, even when that person may not be able to recognise those feelings in themselves.

Beatrice is the one who pushes Catherine to be more independent and leave the family home. She encourages her to work and to marry Rodolpho.

CATHERINE

Catherine is the niece of Beatrice and Eddie, but has been raised like their daughter. When the play starts, she is on the threshold of adulthood and is seeking to assert her independence. She is thwarted in this by Eddie's overbearing protection and suppressed desires. She matures over the course of the play as she overcomes Eddie's protestations to secure a job and pursue a relationship with Rodolpho.

Despite her progress, Catherine is often easily led by others – she is significantly influenced by both Beatrice and Rodolpho at different times throughout the play. In fact, she only starts to assert her independence because Beatrice advises her to do so. Further, Rodolpho still calls her "young girl" after they have entered into a relationship - in some ways he becomes a kind of replacement for Eddie, teaching and telling her what to do.

While it would have been difficult for a young woman in the 1950s to achieve a total sense of independence, Catherine does show true progression towards the end of the play when she berates Eddie and justifies her relationship with Rodolpho.



LEFT TO RIGHT: RODOLPHO, MARCO & ALFIERI.
DRAWINGS BY ANTHONY NOCERA FOR STATE THEATRE COMPANY.

RODOLPHO

Rodolpho is the younger of the two brothers who moves into the Carbone household. Unlike his brother, Rodolpho has not family back home to support and he expresses a desire to become an American. He spends more lavishly than his brother, purchasing records and clothes, and taking Catherine out on dates. Rodolpho sings, cooks and can sew – activities often considered to be feminine. Because of this, Eddie repeatedly says he “ain’t right”, implying that Rodolpho is a homosexual. When Rodolpho and Catherine start a relationship, Eddie suggests that Rodolpho is only looking for a way to become an American citizen. Rodolpho denies this and consistently professes his love for Catherine, although he does sometimes treat her as a child (much like Eddie does). Although he has had his differences with Eddie, Rodolpho tries to stop Marco from hurting him at the end of the play.

MARCO

Marco is the older of the two brothers who illegally emigrates from Sicily to New York. He has a wife and young children back home and has come to America find work. He intends to return to Sicily once he has made enough money. He is sympathetic, hard-working, and serious; he tends to be more traditionally masculine than his brother. Marco values loyalty, honour and familial duty, as seen in his desire to seek revenge on Eddie after he turns the brothers into the authorities.

ALFIERI

Alfieri is an Italian-American lawyer who consults with Eddie over his troubles, as well as acting as a kind of narrator for the play. Alfieri represents the chorus commonly found in classic Greek tragedies, warning the audience and commenting on the action taking place. He provides Eddie with legal advice and helps bail Marco out of prison later in the play.



THE BROOKLYN BRIDGE. DRAWING BY ANTHONY NOCERA FOR STATE THEATRE COMPANY.

THE NEIGHBOURS

There are a number of side characters mentioned in *A View from the Bridge*, mostly neighbours and other people from the area. MR AND MRS LIPARI, who are also hiding illegal immigrant family members, are two notable characters, as are Eddie's friends LOUIS and MIKE. Eddie often talks about the other people in the neighbourhood and is eager to be thought of well by them.

What next?

Pick a character from *A View from the Bridge*. What are the key differences between the chosen character and the other characters in the story? List their physical features, their emotions and what they are aiming for in the story. Come up with ideas about their speech, posture, mannerisms and gestures. Why do you think these work for the character? For example, if a character gestures with their hands a lot, does that mean they're angry? Struggling to express themselves? Something else?

What do you think the character most wants to say in the play, but struggles to express? For example, Beatrice's longing for Eddie or Marco's missing his family. Write a letter from the point of view of your chosen character to a character not depicted (for example, Marco's wife, the character's mother or a close friend) to express the feelings or ideas they might have been bottling up.

Perform the letter as a monologue. Remember to keep the list of their physical characteristics, emotions and other mannerisms in mind in your performance.

Supporting materials

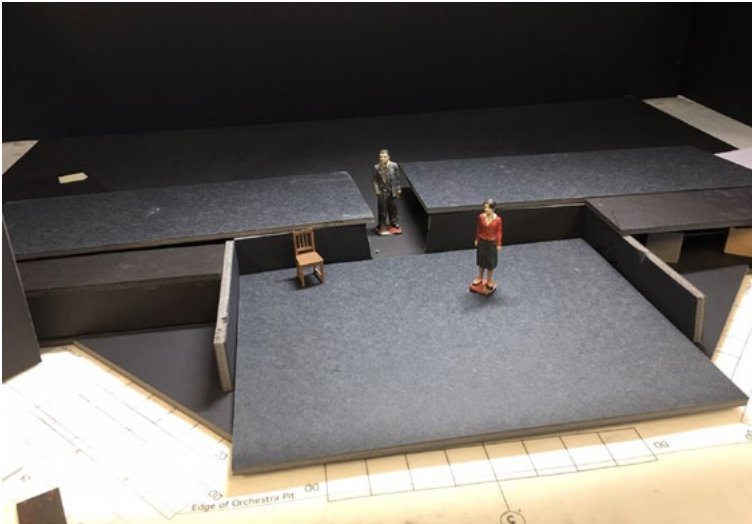
Video interviews with Maiah Stewardson & Mark Saturno

Links to these resources are under the *A View from the Bridge* drop-down menu at: statetheatrecompany.com.au/education-program

The design process

A PHOTO ESSAY

BY SET DESIGNER VICTORIA LAMB



Early stages

After reading a script, and familiarising myself with a play, I will chat with the director. My first meeting with Kate [Champion] was over a coffee in December 2018. We discussed our initial impressions of the piece, and the general direction we wanted to go. We were certain that we did not want a naturalistic set; we wanted something that was abstract and not period specific, though were not sure about going down a very minimalist path as some recent productions of this play have.

I like to work with models as much as possible. The first thing I will do on any show is place a 1:25 figure on the empty stage of the model box. I find sitting with the director in front of an actual 3D object makes things much clearer than 2D sketches. After discussing general themes, and intent, we both sat in front of the model box. It is very important for me to ask basic, practical questions such as, how many entrances do you want? Do you want different levels? Where do you want actors to sit? How big should the performance space be?

When creating an abstract design, the realistic setting must be understood before it can be deconstructed. After the first meeting, Kate and I had both researched the period and setting of the play. We exchanged many images and ideas, some directly related to 1950s Brooklyn, others more generally inspirational.

With this information we put together a very rough mockup of what the shape of the performance space might look like (see photo above).



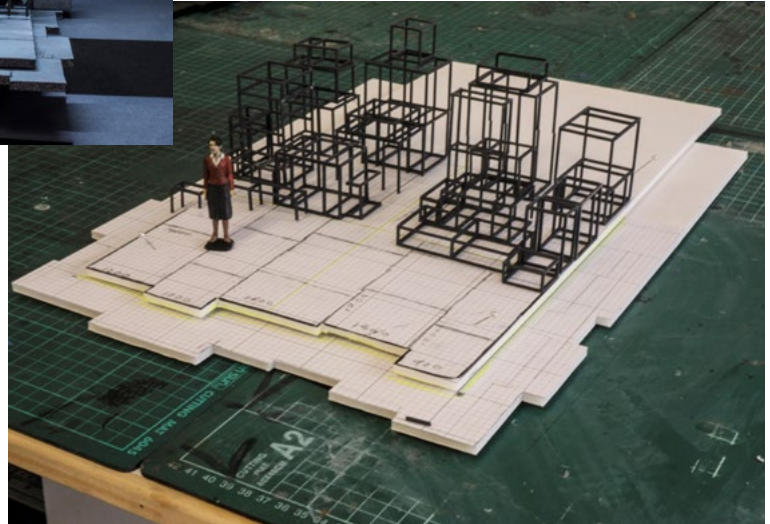
Building on ideas

After this meeting, I went back to our reference material, and the scenic elements we wanted to try out. We liked the ropes as they were reminiscent of the Brooklyn Bridge and tied into the work the men do on the wharves. Kate also had ideas about how the actors might physically interact with them. The edges of the stage were weathered wood, also evoking the wharves.

This version (above left) is still very minimalist, and we could have left it there, but after putting the project aside for a few weeks, to work on other things, I had a nagging feeling that it was not right yet. It seemed too formal and austere. And did not reflect the chaotic and crowded world of the play.

So I literally chopped it up (above right). The platforms started to become boxes. I began to add steel frames, again inspired by images of the actual Brooklyn Bridge. Though not sure where it was going, this was starting to feel much better. It was certainly more chaotic.

After more discussions with Kate, we were both very keen to keep going down this path. The ropes started to get attached to individual boxes, with the idea that they might be raised and lowered. A step was added at the front of the stage and smaller boxes at the back, creating spaces actors could sit. However, the model at this point was literally bits of paper precariously balanced together.



Next steps

I created a more solid version (above left); still just grey shapes as I had not decided what the colors or textures would be. The boxes were still just a sketched in, a haphazard pile. It was time to start seriously mapping out how the boxes would be spaced and where the actors might need to be on them or inside them. The next step was for Kate and I to hash these things out. We also started to talk with Chris [Petridis], the lighting designer.

With this information I went to the work bench. We had refined the space further, extending the step around the sides and spacing the boxes so actors could walk between them. I began to grid up the design and make decisions about the measurements of all the parts. I also began using my 3D printer to make accurate model frames for the boxes (above right).

The next stage was finalising the textures and doing the 'coloring in'. We ended up with four main textural elements, inspired by the reference images of Red Hook – external weathered wood from the pier, internal brown floorboards, rusted steel frames and the ropes. The jetty pylons were a last minute addition (see left photo on page 26).



Presenting to the Company

It was time to present the model (above left) to State Theatre Company at the 'White Card' presentation. This is the first time the director and designer show the Company the concept for approval. It is not a finished model, but it needs to be clear enough to convey our intentions. It is usually done a month before the final presentation. The orange figures were used to show how we wanted to have actors in the boxes.

I also used Photoshop to create a concept image of how the stage might look with the boxes suspended, perhaps an idea for the opening scene (above right).

I explained that from the outset we had wanted to create a claustrophobic space. The play is set on the ground floor of a high density apartment block. There is a sense throughout the play of the presence of the community going on around them, watching them. The space literally compartmentalises many of the characters and blocks them in. Their forced proximity contributes to the boiling tension.

With the concept and space (and budget) finalised and approved, I spent the next four weeks making the final model, drafting plans and creating more concept images.



Final design and build

The above left photo shows the model as it appeared at the final design presentation in May 2019. The above right and bottom left photos are the concept images for the start and end of the play.

A few weeks after the final presentation, the workshop begins the build and rehearsals start. Every design process is different. Each production is the result of the collaboration of many people, its what makes the job so challenging and rewarding.



VICTORIA LAMB'S FINAL SET MODEL. PHOTO: MIKE SMITH.

Abstract & naturalistic set design

Naturalistic set design aims to reflect real life back to the audience. This type of setting is often used to transport audience members to the world the characters inhabit.

Abstract set design is not naturalistic, although it may include aspects of the natural setting (in this case, the ropes, wooden surfaces and jetty pylons could be considered naturalistic elements). It is often used to jolt audiences into thinking about the fact that they are watching a play. Abstract design deal with the concepts of the play and the mood the creative team is trying to create, rather than reflecting an actual setting. This kind of design often uses symbols and metaphors that can be used by the audience to interpret meanings in the work.

Supporting materials

An video and text interview with State Theatre Company's scenic artist will be available prior to the opening of the play. Check for these resources under the *A View from the Bridge* drop-down menu at: statetheatrecompany.com.au/education-program



Costume design

AN INTERVIEW WITH ENKEN HAGGE

What is the role of a costume designer?

The costume designer's role is to ensure that the clothes worn by the actors match both the story that the actors and director are trying to tell, and support the set and lighting designs. Sometimes the costumes are designed to complement the set, and sometimes they are designed to stand out, but they should always advance the story and characterisation.

How do you feel costume design can help to connect with the themes or story of a show?

Costume design is often the first visual cue the audience has for the characters that appear on stage. Even before they speak a line, the clothes they wear give us clues as to where they come from and what kind of people they are. In *A View from the Bridge*, the costumes give the audience an idea of the working class life that the longshoremen lead, as well as the distinction between the Italian immigrants and those that have lived in New York for some time. There are quite a few references to clothing in the script, notably Eddie's commentary on Catherine and Rodolpho's outfits. The costume design supports the themes of gender performance that are explored in the play.

How would you describe the costume design for *A View from the Bridge*?

The costume design for *A View from the Bridge* is a modern take on a story that was originally set in the 1950s. Although the play now has a more contemporary setting, I wanted to reference its 1950s origins. To that end, the menswear has elements of classic workwear such as denim and plaid, and the womenswear echoes the beautiful shapes and fabrics of 50s fashion, but with a more modern silhouette. I wanted the clothes to look timeless.



What are some of the processes and techniques you use in the creative process?
Anything can be a starting point for a costume design.

Once I have a sense of the characters from reading the script, I look at vintage photographs of people who lived those lives – in this case, longshoremen in 1950s New York. This informs the silhouettes and elements that are crucial to constructing those characters.

Looking at the set design is another step in designing clothes that integrate with the whole vision for the show, as is talking to the director about their thoughts for the characters.

From there on, sampling fabrics and looking at the colour palette for the overall design can happen, as does sketching up rough ideas for the individual looks.

The final design takes into account what characters are on stage with each other in various scenes, and ensuring all the looks harmonise and complement each other.

“If I could cook, if I could sing, if I could make dresses, I wouldn’t be on the water front. I would be someplace else. I would be like in a dress store.”

- Eddie, speaking about Rodolpho



Lighting design

AN INTERVIEW WITH CHRIS PETRIDIS



What is the role of a lighting designer in theatre?

Ultimately, the lighting designer's role is to make decisions about how various elements of the show are illuminated. There are lots of parts of this decision, including: the brightness and colour of the light, the length of time that the light is up, the angle of the light, which elements are you trying to highlight with the lighting and which elements form the background. These decisions can be made in any numbers of ways but usually for me involve trying to convey some sort of mood or emotion.

How did you become a lighting designer?

I started at school as an actor and was slowly drawn to the technical side of theatre and ended up loving working with light.

How would you describe the lighting design for A View from the Bridge? How does the lighting design emphasise or connect with the themes of the show?

The lighting design is difficult.. also sculptural and moody. I think the reason this work resonated with me was how incredibly well written it is. The characters are so multi-faceted and complex and seem very real to me. I wanted the lighting design to emphasise the isolation and working class nature of the characters.

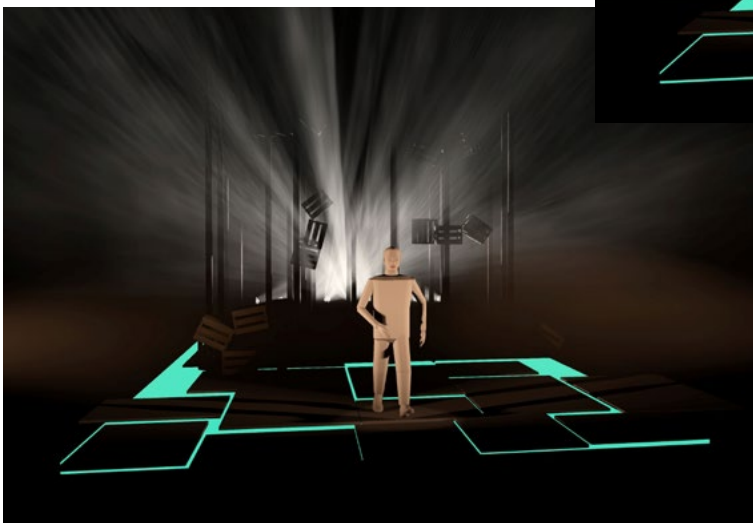
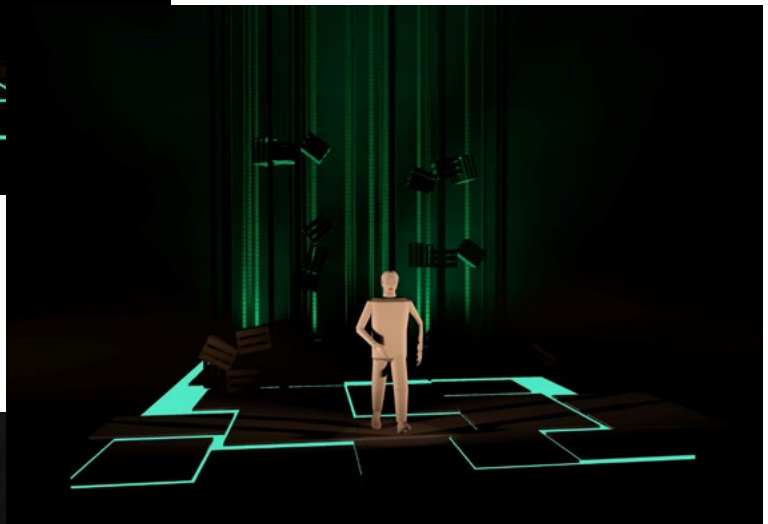
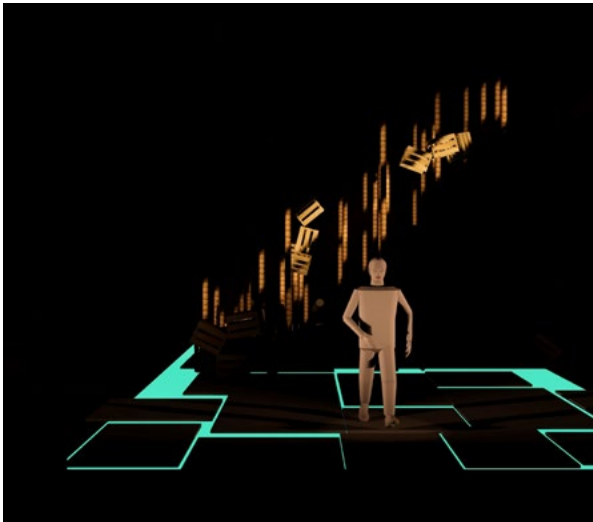
What processes or techniques do you use to create the lighting design for a play?

Usually it starts with reading the play just for the sake of reading it. Then I read it again thinking about lighting. I'll start talking to the director and the rest of the design team to discuss our various reactions to the play. Then I go away and gather or generate images that I think help convey how I think the lighting should look or feel.

From there it is usually a matter of drawing a plan, costing the design and observing rehearsals to see what needs adjusting.

Early concept images

Lighting designer Chris Petridis has provided a number of early concept images of the lighting design, show how elements of the set might be highlighted at different moments.





Sound design & composition

AN INTERVIEW WITH JASON SWEENEY

What is the role of a sound designer? And of a composer?

A sound designer is responsible for the entire sonic experience and audio journey for the play or performance. This not only includes placement of certain pieces of music, effects, live microphones and soundscapes over the course of the play, but also things like the location of speakers and sound sources. The sound design is often built within computer software so that specific cues can be sent to different speakers or activate live microphones, allowing sound to 'travel' within the space of the theatre. However, a sound 'design' can mean so many different things to different people.

A composer is responsible for the making of music and soundscape works. Whether this means composing a score for other musicians to play and then be recorded or, for people like myself, building pieces of music in a studio environment, both electronically and acoustically.

I do want to stress that role of a sound designer and a composer are not necessarily intertwined. They are actually two jobs requiring very specific technical skill-sets, and as such should generally be engaged as separate workloads. Working in theatre, however, the two roles inevitably merge.

How did you become a sound designer and composer?

I've been working as a musician in bands since the early 1990s, but then I also trained in performance and theatre. The natural progression was to start scoring for my own performance works, which then led to being invited to make scores for other makers, theatre and dance companies and film productions. I believe passionately in the art form of live performance and live music – whether it be on mainstage theatres or in grungy pubs. The absolute thrill of working in large theatres is having the ability to create expansive and big-scale soundtracks.

How do you feel sound design and composition can help to tell the story or connect with the themes of a show?

My approach is that composition as one singular job (as mentioned above) requires much sensitivity when working with a story or a show's theme. The compositions need to become their own character, sitting as perfectly as they can in the work itself. Like the characters on stage, the composition has to move between 'moments' – sometimes up front, never upstaging, always dancing delicately, carrying the audience through the emotional flow of the production.

The sound design is then the foundation and technical 'score' that plots how pieces of music, effects or soundscape are located in scenes, transitions and underscores. For example, in *A View from the Bridge* the composition and sound design seeks to support the emotional arc of the play without becoming nostalgic, overdramatic or intrusive. Sometimes the best score can be one that no-one notices because it 'exists' in the world rather than juts out like a sore thumb!

How would you describe the composition for *A View from the Bridge*?

My composition for *A View from the Bridge*, I hope, exists in a world of abstraction and has a dream-like quality to it that, as I mentioned, becomes a kind of sonic character. It floats in and out when there is a need to support both Kate Champion's direction and vision, subtly prompting the audience to understand that something is shifting, building or changing within the play.

What processes do you use to create the sound design or composition for a play?

I am a studio-based composer and work mostly in audio software using instrument plug-ins - but do like to use old pianos and re-work them electronically. I do sometimes work with a small crew of other musicians and record parts that I can integrate into compositions and scores.

Have you drawn on any particular artists or ideas to create the composition for the play?

There are probably way too many influences to list, but I have drawn a lot of inspiration from the work of Icelandic composer Hildur Guðnadóttir for this production. That said, the greatest influences and ideas come from the energy of the room and the collaborative process that takes place during the making and rehearsal process – and, of course, closely following Kate's vision for the work.

“He sings, see. Which is - I mean, it's all right, but sometimes he hits a note, see. I turn around. I mean - high. You know what I mean?”

- Eddie, speaking about Rodolpho



ENKEN HAGGE'S COSTUME DESIGN DRAWINGS. PHOTO: MIKE SMITH.

What next?

Choose a type of design to focus on - set, costume, lighting or sound. Think about what sort of direction you might take with your design.

Would it reflect the original setting of 1950s Brooklyn? Or would you choose a different time or place? Or something more abstract? If going for something naturalistic, what sort of location would you use (indoors, outdoors, kitchen, club room, grounds, cafe, etc.)? How might you use elements to indicate location changes for different scenes?

Think about the feeling you are trying to create with your design. List how the elements you have chosen might reinforce this feeling. How might you change these elements as the play progresses?

Create a mood board for your design - focus on a particular scene if that is helpful. For set, costume and lighting design, find or draw images and diagrams related to your vision. For sound design, find sounds or songs to create the feel you are looking for.

In writing or in a presentation, explain why you have made these choices and how your design connects with the story and themes of *A View from the Bridge*.



Themes

Love & desire

Love and desire are central motivating forces in *A View from the Bridge*.

Familial love ties Eddie, Beatrice and Catherine together and is the reason Beatrice allows her cousins to come and live with them. It is Marco's love of his own family that compels him to come to America.

Romantic love is also present in the relationship between Catherine and Rodolpho, and is what Beatrice feels towards Eddie.

We view this familial and romantic love to be natural. This play explores what happens when people are motivated by strong desires that cannot be defined by traditional relationships. This is most apparent in Eddie's love for Catherine, which many of the other characters perceive as a kind of sexual desire for her. Beatrice indicates to Eddie, both subtly and more directly, that his love for Catherine crosses a line into unnatural desire. Eddie's love for Catherine becomes increasingly obsessive and possessive as the play progresses.

Eddie's reactions to Rodolpho, particularly his frequent exclamation that he "ain't right", may also indicate repressed desires. Some readings of Miller's play suggest that Eddie's fixation on Rodolpho's sexuality and the kiss he forces on the younger man are a sign that he desires Rodolpho sexually himself.



Immigration & identity

A View from the Bridge is set in Red Hook, Brooklyn, an Italian immigrant community in New York.

The play explores the dual identity of many in the neighbourhood – tied to their family's roots in Italy, but identifying as American. This is most starkly illustrated in Alfieri's opening speech, which speaks about the area's Italian heritage, but concludes that "now we are quite civilized, quite American." The immigrants have assimilated to the American way of life. This speech also juxtaposes the supposed violence of Italian justice and the apparent civility of American law (see the theme section on duty and justice).

Many of the characters in the play see America as a place of opportunity, particularly Rodolpho and Marco. The reality is somewhat different from the dream, as the pair are forced to hide from authorities to avoid being sent back to Italy. Still, Rodolpho is eager to embrace all that America has to offer; Marco, on the other hand, plans to return to Italy. This idea is reinforced when Marco resorts to a form of violent justice to seek revenge on Eddie, while Rodolpho instead makes plans to become an American citizen.

"Oh, there were many here who were justly shot by unjust men. Justice is very important here."

- Alfieri

Duty & justice

Ideas about duty and doing the 'right thing' are prevalent throughout the play. There are two main types of duty explored – familial and legal.

The action of the play is propelled by the arrival of Beatrice's cousins, whom she feels a family duty to take into her home. The whole family feels they are responsible for ensuring the two new arrivals are able to find work and are kept safe.

The character of Marco is motivated by an additional sense of familial duty – he must raise enough money to help support his young family back in Italy.

Both Eddie and Beatrice feel a duty towards Catherine, feeling they must protect her. Their ideas of what is best for Catherine differ greatly – Eddie wants to keep her close, while Beatrice wants to send her away – but both are duty-bound to protect her from outside dangers.

But the legal duty of the characters is often placed in opposition to the familial, making it difficult for characters to make the 'right' choice. We see this particularly through the character of Eddie.

Although his motives must be questioned, Eddie's appeal to Alfieri to find a way to protect Catherine from Rodolpho seeks to find a way to marry legal and familial duty. He finds it difficult to understand why the two do not align.

Similarly, while Eddie is bound by personal and familial duty to protect Marco and Rodolpho, his legal duty is to report their illegal presence in his home. When Eddie decides to turn the men over to authorities, the wider neighbourhood sees this as a great injustice.

The idea of justice is also often opposed to that of legal duty within the action of the play. Alfieri first discussed the idea of Italian justice being opposed to American law in his opening speech. We see the opposition of justice and law not only in the example given above, but in Marco's desire to seek justice after Eddie report him. Marco believes revenge to be just and appropriate in this situation, particularly as this has made it more difficult for him to do his duty by his own family back in Italy. But the law does not agree.

The play highlights the failures of the law in upholding justice and helping people to fulfill their duty to others. However, taking justice into one's own hands or allowing familial duty to be too strong a driving force is also shown to be destructive.



Respect & reputation

Matters of respect and reputation are important in the tightknit community of Red Hook. Several of the characters are concerned about maintaining their position in the community, but none more so than Eddie.

Eddie is increasingly obsessed with the opinions of others and protecting his name. When Rodolpho arrives, some of Eddie's concerns about him revolve around what others think, calling him "blondie" and "Paper Doll" because of his looks and singing. The implication is that Eddie is concerned others will think less of him because of what they think of Rodolpho.

He also becomes protective over his role as the patriarch of the Carbone house, concerned that the rest of the family are not paying him the respect he deserves. This leads to increasing tension between the characters.

After he turns Marco and Rodolpho in to the authorities, Eddie loses both his reputation and the respect of the community. His reputation is lost when Marco spits on him and publically accuses him of turning the brothers in to the Immigration Bureau. His neighbours no longer respect him, ostracizing and ignoring him because of what he has done. But Eddie cares too much about his good name and the opinion of others to let this easily slide. He clings to the notion that Marco needs to restore his name and refuses to see sense when Beatrice and Catherine try to convince him to change his mind. In some ways, it seems Eddie's defensiveness and zealous concern over his reputation that causes others to lose all respect for him.



PHOTO: MIKE SMITH.

What next?

Select one of the themes from *A View from the Bridge* listed on pages 35-38 or choose another theme that you noticed in the play.

Provide examples of instances where this theme is present in Arthur Miller's original text - include any applicable quotes or stage directions.

After seeing the play, think about any additional concepts, line delivery, costuming or other elements that emphasised your chosen theme.

Write about how the original text and technical elements of the play send a particular message or emphasise a particular point related to this theme. Use quotes and direct examples to support your argument.

Supporting materials

Other resources and activities will be provided on the website prior to the show. These resources will be available under the *A View from the Bridge* drop-down menu at: statetheatrecompany.com.au/education-program

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